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Dr. John S. Billings,
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THE
CHAIR OF SURGERY
IN
RUSH MEDICAL COLLEGE.

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The Chair of Surgery in Rush Medical College.

BY
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OF CHICAGO.

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SURGEON PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL.

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THE CHAIR OF SURGERY IN RUSH MEDICAL COLLEGE.

Within the short space of four years ruthless death has twice vacated the Chair of Surgery in this college. On both of these sad occasions the faculty, students and alumnæ felt that an irreparable loss had been sustained. To fill the Chair of Surgery made vacant by the death of men who have distinguished themselves in their profession by honest scientific work, and have endeared themselves to their colleagues and students as exemplary and masterly teachers is by no means an easy task, hence the anxious inquiries from all sides and everywhere: Who shall be the successor? Who shall continue the work left unfinished? Rush Medical College has always been justly proud of its Chair of Surgery. Its founder was a surgeon of world-wide repute, and there can be no doubt that from its very beginning the men who have occupied this chair have been the great magnet which has attracted an increasing number of students from year to year. I am not saying too much, if I make the claim, that the Chair of Surgery in this school, with the immense clinics attached to it, stand to-day, in the estimation of the profession and the people, second to none in this country.

The faculty of this college has entrusted me with the work commenced by the immortal Brainard, the work so faithfully and ably conducted by

the genial and scholarly Gunn, the work brought up to the present immense proportions and importance through the heroic labors of Parkes, whose untimely death is now the cause of universal sorrow. To be chosen as successor of such men should satisfy the goal of ambition of any man. To be the fourth in a genealogy of a group of such surgeons in the oldest and most famous institution for medical education in the great Northwest is a mark of distinction which I fully appreciate, and which I shall make a faithful endeavor to merit by earnest devotion to the duties imposed, and by contributing my humble share towards making this great city what it surely will be in less than twenty-five years—the most important medical centre in the United States.

Brainard, the founder of this institution and the first occupant of the Chair of Surgery, was a great surgeon, a gifted teacher, and an original investigator. His giant intellect was not content in acquiring, practicing and teaching what was known at his time, but sought new fields for exploration, and the knowledge thus gained was freely infused into his students. Brainard's work in the field of experimental surgery brought him an international fame, and his name will be quoted as long as books on surgery will be printed. His work has not only left numerous permanent impressions in surgical literature, but it created a stimulus which took possession of his students and the progressive surgeons throughout the civilized world, leading them away from the old well-beaten paths into new, unexplored territories awaiting the advance column of original explorers. It is difficult to estimate the importance and magnitude of his work in this direction, but hundreds of his students scattered all over this country still remain living witnesses of his zeal, industry and

ability as a surgeon, teacher and scientist. They are to be envied for having received their first surgical knowledge from one of the greatest, and certainly from the most original surgeon that America has yet produced.

Professor Gunn assumed a responsible position when he succeeded Brainard. That the faculty acted wisely in securing his services has been abundantly shown by his marvellous success as a teacher and the ever-increasing prosperity of the college under his watchful eye and judicious guidance. Gunn loved this institution dearly and jealously watched its interests. He was more than a friend of every one of its graduates. He was not only familiar with the current surgical literature but also added his share of original scientific work. His love for original research seemed to increase as he grew older. His contributions to our knowledge of the mechanism of dislocations were the outcome of patient experimental work and philosophical reasoning, and mark a decided advance in this important department of surgery. His last paper on this subject is a masterly product and should be in the hands of every student, as it is a genuine *multum in parvo*, containing all essential facts pertaining to this difficult chapter in surgery in a nutshell. Although the faculty, the students, and every graduate felt keenly the great loss sustained by the death of Professor Gunn the action of the faculty was plain in the selection of his successor. Professor Gunn made ample provision to meet such an emergency during the whole time he was connected with the college. He selected and trained his own successor. The late Professor Parkes was well aware of this fact and made the best of his excellent opportunities. For fifteen years he taught anatomy with an enthusiasm and ability

unsurpassed in this or any other country. Under his tuition thousands of students learned to regard the study of anatomy as a pleasant and profitable pastime instead of an uninteresting drudgery, as is so often the case when taught by one less skilled and conversant with his subject; and left the college perfectly familiar with the essential basis of a thorough knowledge of surgery. During all this time Parkes was the right-hand of his teacher of surgery, master and student assisting and stimulating each other in their respective work. How well he had prepared himself for his life-work is shown by his short, but brilliant career as professor of surgery. His accurate knowledge of anatomy combined with his familiarity with modern surgery made him a brilliant and successful operator. His skill as a surgeon was soon recognized and was eagerly sought for far and near. His success as a surgeon has made this clinic what it is to-day, one of the largest and most profitable on the continent. As a teacher few equalled, none surpassed him. Like his predecessors, Parkes was not only a distinguished surgeon and great teacher, but also an enthusiastic, faithful worker in the field of original research. His valuable experimental investigations on the surgical treatment of penetrating gunshot wounds of the abdomen have laid the foundation for the rational treatment of these injuries for all time to come. His experimental and clinical contributions in this department of surgery have erected a monument to his memory more enduring than marble and more precious than bronze.

His untimely death is surrounded by halos of peculiarly sad and distressing circumstances. The cold hand of death touched him in the prime of life. The final message reached him at a time when he

was just beginning to reap a well-earned abundant harvest, and when in full view of a professional career unparalleled in usefulness and prosperity. His pen dropped from his busy hand after he had nearly completed what promised to be a most interesting and valuable work on abdominal surgery. His work as a teacher came to a sudden end near the close of the session and just before the Commencement exercises at which one of the largest and best classes left the portals of Rush Medical College in deep mourning over the loss of their favorite and most esteemed teacher. His restless soul departed from this world in the absence of his family, and the last moments of his life were not cheered by words of love and parting kisses from those nearest and dearest to him.

The life of Professor Parkes furnishes a striking illustration of what can be accomplished in a little more than half a life-time by well-directed, hard study; close application to professional duties and unremitting work in search of new facts. In appearing before you as his successor, I am free to confess that it is with a keen appreciation of my many shortcomings. In resuming the work as a teacher of surgery in this institution, I am encouraged by the prospects that I shall, in the near future, be joined in my work by an associate, a surgeon of more than National reputation. If the combined work of both of us shall accomplish for the college and students what was done by Brainard, Gunn and Parkes my ambition and expectation will have been realized. I have left a lucrative practice, a pleasant home, a large circle of professional and social relations, a prospering, wide-awake State, and a beautiful city, and have come here to devote the balance of my life to the interests and

welfare of this college and its students. I am fully conscious of the fact that I am coming at a time when the methods of teaching are undergoing a radical change. In the future recitations will largely take the place of didactic lectures. Text-books will be written with this special end in view. This comparatively new method of teaching surgery will be made a prominent feature during the next and all subsequent sessions. This new departure will necessarily change somewhat the plan and scope of clinical teaching. It is my intention to carefully arrange and classify the available clinical material in my department which will enable me to combine didactic with clinical instruction. This change will result in a reduction of the number of cases brought before the class, but will prevent unnecessary repetition, and thus save more time for the study and examination of pathological lesions, which will be a sufficient inducement for the students to attend every clinic, take full notes of what they see and hear and to remain from beginning to end. May God grant that the work entrusted to me and my colleague may be worthy of our predecessors, and equally efficient in relieving suffering humanity, in advancing the interests and increasing the sphere of usefulness of this college, and finally, in giving to its students a thorough knowledge of the science and art of surgery.

